

# The Cost of Grace

Dear Friends,

I make mistakes. I find myself getting in the most trouble with my words. I make a flippant comment to my wife that isn't really meant to hurt, but she gets offended. Then, being the stubborn person that I am, I continue digging in. Words hurt, and if they are not used wisely, the damage can be really messy. After a big argument where both my wife and I are really upset, it takes some time to let things settle. The more severe arguments can take hours to process through. Eventually, I will ask for forgiveness and do my best to learn from the hurt that I caused her and not make the same mistakes again. The truth is: it takes grace to love. Love takes extending forgiveness and renewal to a painful hurt. The larger the sin or grievance, the more grace is needed to make the relationship whole again.

So, how much does grace cost? In the United States court system, the cost of grace depends on the crime. Grace is more readily given to first time offenders for minor offenses. Children are given more grace than adults. Most of the time grace comes with a heavy price tag. The ultra-wealthy in society can get away with heinous crimes, because they can pay the cost. Like Proverb 18:11 says, "A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his imagination." We see this truth played out in our current day and age quite often. If grace can be bought, is it really grace? I think we can all agree that this world needs grace. There is so much brokenness and if grace is forgiveness and restoration then we are in desperate need for God's grace. Our creator is the only one who can extend grace, because He is the one who is wronged most by sin in the world. All sin is destruction to God's creation. God's grace is free and the invitation to accept His grace is open to His people.

Throughout the Old Testament, God reveals His character to the people of Israel. From the beginning of creation God reveals Himself to be good. Adam and Eve make a mess of God's original plan and He restarts humanity with Noah's family. Abram, a descendant of Noah, is called out of Canaan and receives God's covenant of a new nation set apart for Him. Isaac and Jacob and his twelve sons reveal that sin and brokenness cannot stop God's plan. Israel, a nation set apart for God, is led out of Egypt into the wilderness. They prove themselves faithless over and over again. A generation dies wandering in the wilderness for their sins. The rest of the Old Testament is a cycle of the sin of a broken nation and the grace of a loving God. Then God sent His prophets to lead the people back to God.

The Israelites experienced God's wrath, because of their disobedience. The prophets did their best to lead the people back to God. Isaiah was a prophet during the reign of four different kings of Israel. He ministered for over 40 years, proclaiming the warning of God's wrath. Israel refused to listen to the call of repentance. Isaiah prophesied in great detail about what was coming to Israel, because of their disobedience. Instead of listening, the officials persecuted Isaiah and his fellow prophets. Isaiah also prophesied about the coming Messiah and the age of peace that will come. These two mixed messages show the level of love God has for His creation. God's grace extends beyond forgiveness by promising peace.

Through the Holy Spirit, the prophet Isaiah says, **“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. “Isaiah 55:1-3** God's grace is free for anyone who recognizes their need for Him. In the midst of their sin and disobedience, God is calling his people back to Him. Isaiah is boldly claiming that everyone who thirsts for the Lord can receive His satisfaction. The audience is well aware of the covenant God made with David. God promised David that as long as he and his children followed God with all their hearts, they would lack nothing. Isaiah is saying that if Israel listens to God diligently, relying on His word, they can enter into the same covenant with God. What an outstanding proclamation of grace!

These three verses also describe the free grace we can buy if we cling to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. The sustenance He provides is much more rich than anything this world has to offer. Self-reliance has no place in the Christian faith. Just as the Israelites had to learn the hard way, we must rely on God for the grace our souls so desperately need. God's grace is sufficient for our daily needs. When I struggle with feeling overwhelmed by the daily trials, I remember how amazing God's grace is.

In the previous chapter in Isaiah, God calls Israel to accept Him again. “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” God is calling His people to recognize His provision. The only one who can provide our spiritual or physical needs is God. When we try to fill the

spiritual need that only God can fill, we won't be satisfied. No matter how wealthy you are, you cannot buy your way into heaven. No matter how hard you work, no good deed will pay the price for your soul. We are in desperate need for God's grace every day. God calls us to listen to Him, lean on His promises, and accept the invitation to His table. This call is not just for the people of Israel, but for any who lay hold of God's promises.

God promises eternal life to anyone willing to humble themselves and accept His son. Jesus died on the cross to pay for the grace we need. He submitted himself to the will of the Father and gave himself up for our sake. He is the only one who can pay the price for God's grace. As the only Son of God, Jesus is perfect and sinless. He came to the world to humble himself not to enter into his kingdom. The Jews are still waiting for their Messiah, but Christians recognize that Jesus is the Messiah. Now we wait and work patiently, looking to the daily grace we receive for strength.

The cost of grace is more than mankind can pay. After Adam and Eve sinned against God in the garden of Eden, humanity has struggled with the "god complex." This complex is where we feel like we can replace God in the world. That is the great sin that gives birth to all other sin. Satan convinced Eve to break trust with God and grasp the knowledge of Good and Evil for herself. Ever since then we have struggled against God by trying to make ourselves into gods. The "god complex" causes us to rely on ourselves for salvation. Accepting Jesus as our Savior allows us to have a right relationship with God again. The ultimate sacrifice was made making it possible for us to receive God's grace.

Jesus taught the right way to live by revealing the power of humility and love. He came to serve the world, not be served as was his right. He came from humble origins, not from the royalty in the palace as was his birthright. Jesus lived in humility and love, patient with the stubborn hearted, gracious to the sinners and loving to the cast out in society. In all his ways, Jesus challenged the societal norms, calling for a new way to live based on love. Even towards women and children, Jesus showed a new way to live. In the story of the poor widow, she gave all she had to live on, because she knew God provides.

In the gospel of Mark we read, **"And he (Jesus) sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those**

**who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” Mark 12:41-44** During the life and times of Jesus, women and widows had few rights or protections. Women were restrained to living and working in the house. They could not participate in much of the temple worship, but they could learn in the synagogues. Women had very little education, protection or possibilities in life without a husband. The men cared for and protected women in society. Widows were some of the most vulnerable groups of people during the time of Jesus, because their main source of income had passed away.

So, how much was two copper coins worth? The coins she threw into the plate were most likely called lepton. Two leptons made one prutah. During the time of Jesus 64 prutah made 1 denarius. A denarius was one day’s labor and had the buying power of about \$100. So, the widow put the equivalent of about \$1.25 into the offering plate. Imagine the shock on the disciples faces, when Jesus declares that \$1.25 is more than all the other contributions made that day. How do you think the rich people felt when Jesus said that they put less money in than the widow? Obviously, Jesus isn’t that bad at math! The point is much deeper than the amount of money put in the offering. Jesus is pointing out the sacrifice the widow is making. The widow trusted in God’s provision and grace enough to give all she had to live on. The rich, out of their abundance, gave far more than the widow would ever be able to give in her lifetime. The widow gave all she had to live, she reserved nothing back, because she knew that provision comes from God alone. Jesus is pointing out that she has truly received God’s grace and is responding appropriately. When I was in college, I experienced something like this scenario.

The college I attended was a private Christian liberal arts school in Grand Rapids MI. The cost of tuition was way more than my parents could help with, and even with lots of scholarships and financial aid from the government I still had to pull out loans. I worked a part time job the entire time I was in school. I did my best to pay as much of the bills off as I could. During this time, I was not tithing as I should have. I felt like I needed to use all of the money to pay off some of the debt piling up while in school. I felt stressed, anxious and troubled by these bills and how they never seemed to get paid completely. Finally, God convicted me to tithe what I can to Him. I started tithing everything that I earned and a remarkable thing happened. I would tithe whatever I could bringing my bank balance to zero, and yet the bills were always paid on time. Sometimes all that I could give was \$4, but I did it with joy. The stress was gone, and I didn’t worry about how the bills would get paid. I learned an important lesson about who was in charge in my life.

The more I relinquished my sense of control, the more I learned about God's grace and provision.

The right response to the grace of God is sacrificing our "god complex." We cannot accept Christ as our Lord and Savior then live life as if he wasn't master. We cannot claim a personal and rich relationship with Jesus unless we are ready to give up ourselves for him. This means giving up our pride, our wealth, our possessions and everything else that we claim. It means communing with him on a daily basis, by reading the word of God and being in fellowship with other believers. Relationship with Jesus is the only way to slowly kill our "god complex." The more time we spend with him the more we realize that we are insufficient without him. Jesus reveals the necessity of grace in his death and resurrection. He proved that a perfect sacrifice had to be made to pay for our sins. Now, everyone has the ability to accept the invitation of God's grace.

What can we learn from the cost of Grace? We learn that the world doesn't revolve around us. The grace we receive from God is to be extended to our brothers and sisters. If we are not extending the same grace to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, have we really accepted Jesus' sacrifice? No, our lives must reflect the change of God's grace in us. The only way to show that change is to love others well. Satan will do his best to steal this truth, confuse us and cause division around us. The two greatest commandments God gives us still stand firm, **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself."** **Matthew 22:37, 39** If you are not living out these two commandments, then the grace God extends is not alive in you. God's grace changes lives. The cost of that grace is unimaginable and yet the price was paid for our sins. Our lives must be changed in response to His free grace.

If this message has moved you, if the Holy Spirit is inviting you to receive God's grace, then answer the call. Here are three applications that can help you today:

1. You need God's grace.
2. God's grace is free.
3. The cost of grace is your "god complex."

Yours in Christ,



Chris Aaron Rice